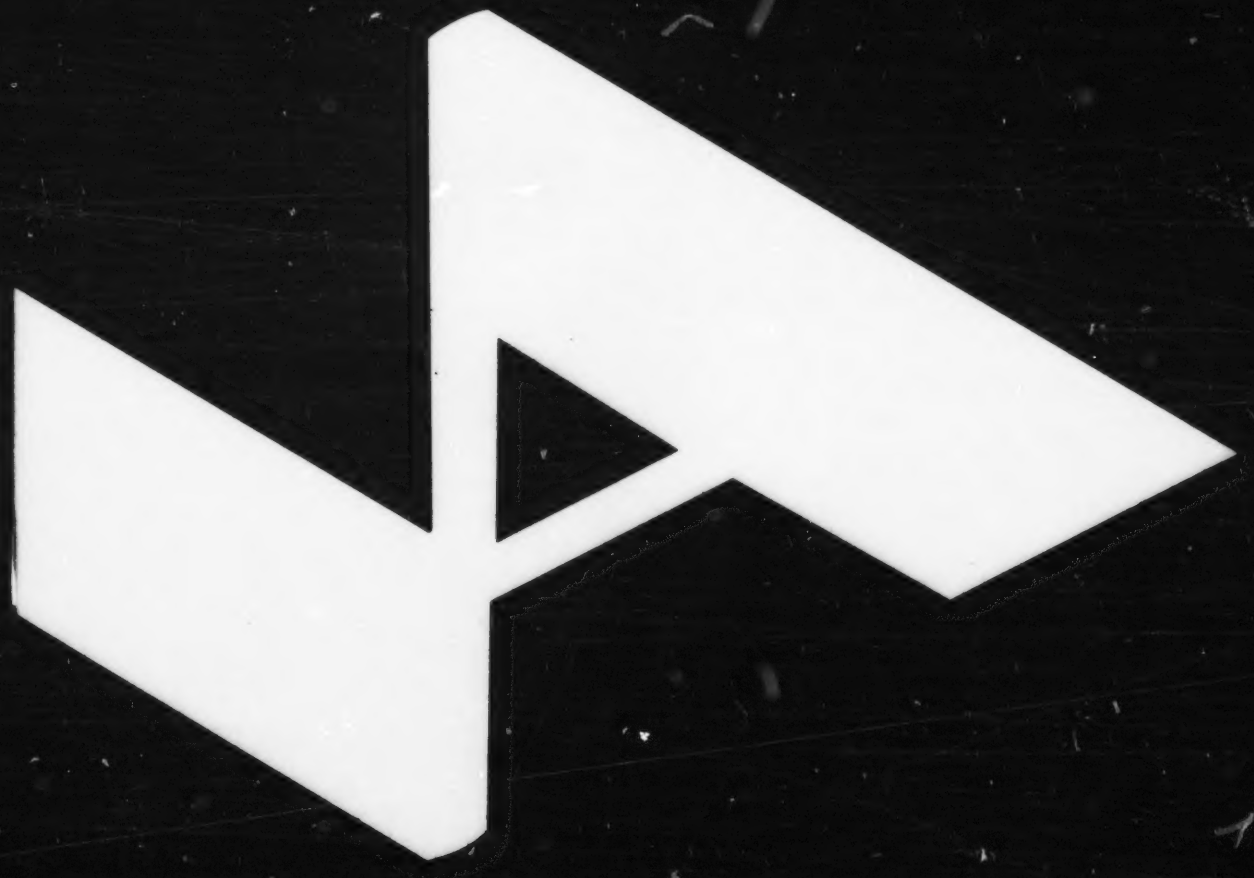
Victim Assistance Program



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A Message from the Attorney General

An accessible, understandable and fair justice system is the cornerstone of a democratic society.

In recent years, there has been an increased recognition of the special needs of victims of crime.

British Columbia is a leader in providing programs and services to ensure victims of crime receive information and support throughout the justice process, from the initial report of the crime, through the prosecution of the case in court, to the sentencing of convicted offenders.

The Victim Assistance Program will continue to provide coordinated, professional and considerate services to meet the needs of victims of crime and to ensure direct and personal access to justice for all British Columbians.

Russell G. Fraser
Attorney General

A Message from the Solicitor General

More and more British Columbians are coming forward to report crimes committed against them.

Why?

I think the answer lies, at least in part, in the work of the Victim Assistance Program of British Columbia.

Through the Victim Assistance Program, victims of crime in British Columbia can receive consistent and professional information and support services in most parts of the province.

I salute the dedicated staff and volunteers of the Victim Assistance Program who provide victims of crime with the support they need to come forward and participate in the justice system of this province.

Ivan Messmer

Ivan C. Messmer
Solicitor General

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1991 and Beyond

Victim Assistance Program
IN BRIEF: OUR PURPOSE, HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

What We Do

British Columbia is an exceptionally safe place in which to live, but it is not crime-free.

Crime, of all kinds, does happen here.

The Victim Assistance Program of British Columbia is funded and coordinated by two government ministries - the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Solicitor General - to help victims of crime come to terms with the effects of the crimes committed against them.

The Program provides victims of crime with the information, practical assistance and the emotional support they need to fully participate in the justice system of this province.

Where We Started...

The first formal victim assistance programs in B.C. were established in the early 1970s.

These first programs were community-based initiatives, focused primarily on the victims of wife assault, sexual assault and child abuse. They included the first Sexual Assault Centre (1972), and the first Transition House for battered women (1973).

Over the next 20 years, recognition and concern for victims of crime - all kinds of crime - increased substantially, within the justice system and the community at large:

- in 1972, the provincial government passed the **Criminal Injury Compensation Act**, allowing victims of crime who have suffered personal injury to apply to the Workers' Compensation Board for compensation;
- in 1983 and 1985 respectively, the Ministry of Attorney General introduced the province's first Wife Assault and Child Sexual Abuse Policies to ensure that the interests of victims are fully considered throughout the justice process; and
- in 1986, the Ministry established the use of Victim Impact Statements, where information about the effects of a crime on the victim may be collected by Crown Counsel and provided to the court when an offender is sentenced.

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, more agencies began to develop local programs for victims of child abuse, wife assault and sexual assault, and:

- the Ministry of Attorney General began to financially assist six Sexual Assault Centres around the province and the Lower Mainland's Battered Women's Support Services;

"Most victims feel helpless and powerless. We are able to tell them that they're not. We are able to give them the attention and support they need to put their victimization behind them and move forward. I know we're making a difference."

Coordinator with Police-based Victim Assistance Programs

- the police - both RCMP and municipal police forces - started to incorporate the needs of victims into their community policing and crime prevention programs and to develop the first police-based victim assistance programs;
- the Corrections Branch of the Ministry of Solicitor General began to develop a number of reparation programs, enabling offenders - whether they are sentenced or diverted (the case is resolved without going to court) - to make amends to their victims; and
- the Criminal Justice Branch of the Ministry of Attorney General began planning a pilot project to provide victim/witness services through the Victoria Crown Counsel office.

Finally, in June 1987, the Ministry of Attorney General published a discussion paper entitled **Victim Assistance Program: Balancing the Scales of Justice.**

This discussion paper recommended joining existing programs and adding new programs - such as a telephone information line - under one coordinated and integrated umbrella to:

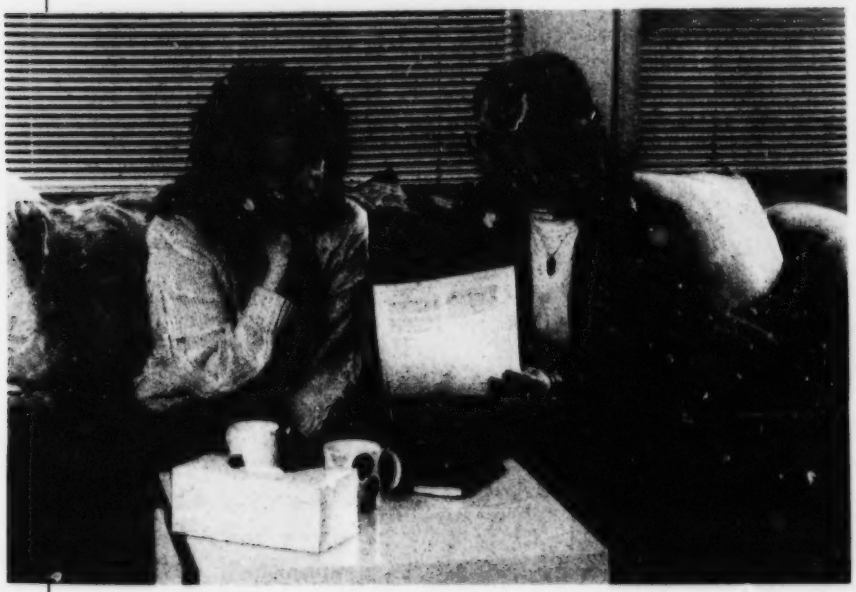
- enhance and geographically expand existing victim assistance programs to ensure a basic level of direct services province-wide; and
- provide greater access to accurate and useful information for all British Columbians.Later in 1987, this model was adopted to create the consolidated Victim Assistance Program of British Columbia.

How We Work...

The Program works as a partnership or network between the Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General, the police and the community at large.

With funding from the two ministries, 95 separate victim programs now operate through Crown Counsel offices and the Corrections Branch, local police departments and community agencies.

The Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General together coordinate victim services through an inter-ministry Victim Assistance Program Working Group. This Group provides management advice, leadership and policy direction to ensure that all programs and services are integrated effectively and efficiently.



Filling out forms can be difficult and confusing, especially for victims of crime. Victim Assistance Program workers assist victims of crime to complete, criminal injury compensation applications and Victim Impact Statements.

THE VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM OF B.C.

The coordinated Victim Assistance Program of B.C. works to ensure that victims of crime receive the finest assistance possible through:

The Victims Information Line

The Victims Information Line - 1-800-VICTIMS - is a toll-free telephone service offering callers easy access to information on victim services across the province.

Most callers require straightforward information about where to go for assistance. Callers are referred to a local Victim Assistance Program.

State-of-the-art technology helps the Victims Information Line provide callers from across B.C. with information on victim programs and services available in their own communities.

Specialized Support Programs

29 Specialized Support Programs - operate through community agencies across the province - providing information, practical and emotional support to victims of wife assault, sexual assault and child sexual abuse.

With funding from the Ministry of Attorney General, paid coordinators and highly-trained volunteers assist victims of crime by:

- providing information about the justice system and what will be required of them throughout the investigation and court process;
- reporting on the progress of their cases;
- assisting victims to complete criminal injury compensation applications, and Victim Impact Statements, and other forms;
- helping to arrange child care and transportation;
- providing court orientation; accompanying victims to court; and
- referring victims to other community resources - including social services, housing, counselling and health agencies - as needed.

Police-based Victim Assistance Programs

There are 46 Police-based Victim Assistance Programs - located in the police departments or detachments of most large and many small communities throughout B.C. - to assist victims of crime from their first point of contact with the criminal justice system. These programs work with victims of any kind of crime, from breaking and entering, robbery and assault, to impaired driving and murder.

Police-based Victim Assistance Programs are managed by paid civilian program coordinators. Highly-trained volunteers work with coordinators and police to provide victims with similar kinds of information, practical and emotional support offered by workers in Specialized Support Programs.

Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services

Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services operate out of eight locations across the province. Managers of these services provide assistance to all Crown Counsel offices throughout B.C. and act as liaison between Crown Counsel and other victim assistance programs.

Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services focus primarily on victims of major emotional or physical trauma and on cases involving fatalities. Paid managers work with highly-trained caseworkers and volunteers to provide victims/witnesses with court and justice system information and orientation to testify in court. They also liaise between victims, families of victims and the prosecutor, and provide practical assistance and emotional support similar to that offered by workers in Specialized Support Programs and Police-based Victim Assistance Programs.

Victim Reparation Programs

The Corrections Branch of the Ministry of Solicitor General funds 11 Victim Reparation Programs. These programs offer offenders the opportunity to compensate victims for damages suffered as a result of their crimes. Victims must volunteer to become part of the program; services are generally offered only to victims of relatively minor crimes.

Victim Reparation Programs provide mediation between the victim and the offender to provide an opportunity for the offender to apologize, the victim to ask questions about the offence, and to reach an agreement on an appropriate form of compensation.

Compensation may be monetary, or it may take the form of direct services to the victim and/or the community at large. One Victim Reparation Program also hires young offenders to work on supervised projects. Part of the offender's wages are then paid to the victim as compensation.

Ministries Support Services

The Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General develop training manuals, workshops and special programs or projects - through such agencies as the Justice Institute of B.C. - to help train and support Program workers.

In partnership with the Justice Institute, the two ministries publish a quarterly newsletter, **Victim Services News**, to keep Program workers up-to-date on the latest developments in victim assistance programs, resources and services.

The ministries also produce information materials for the general public to increase awareness about victim issues and services.

Criminal Injury Compensation Program

Under the **Criminal Injury Compensation Act,** victims of crime who have suffered - physical or emotional trauma - can apply to the Criminal Injury Compensation Program for compensation.

Administered by the Workers' Compensation Board, the Criminal Injury Compensation Program helps victims of crime (and, in some cases, their families) to pay for such things as medical care, lost wages, funeral and burial expenses, therapy and counselling costs.

"If only I had known about you earlier. I didn't know there were people who could help me deal with my violent husband."

- Caller to the Victims Information Line, referred to Battered Women's Support Services

1989/1990:
A YEAR OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

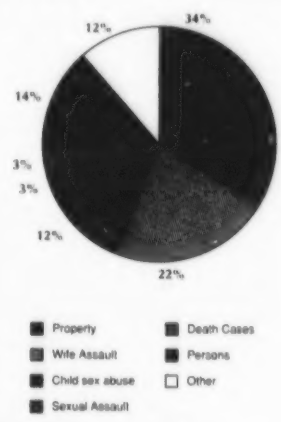
In 1988/1989, 72 victim assistance programs operated throughout British Columbia; during 1989/1990, that number increased to 95.

Early in 1989, the Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General established a detailed monitoring system to compile data on all victim assistance programs.

In the fiscal year 1989/1990 (April 1, 1989 - March 31, 1990):

- 24,000 new clients were accepted into the various victim assistance programs - an increase of about 47 per cent over 1988/1989;
- victims of property offenses accounted for the largest proportion of new clients at 34 per cent, followed by victims of wife assault at 22 per cent, victims of crimes against the person at 14 per cent, and child sexual abuse at 12 per cent; and
- an average of 600 volunteers per month performed a total of 103,352 hours of service to assist and support victims of crime in B.C.

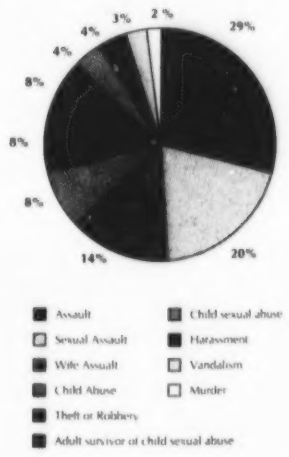
Total Case Load



In 1989/1990, each program area reported significant accomplishments in both the quantity and quality of their service delivery:

- **The Victims Information Line** received a total of 2,450 calls in 1989/1990.
- The largest percentage of calls came from victims of assault at 29 per cent, followed by victims of sexual assault at 20 per cent, wife assault at 14 per cent, and child sexual abuse at 8 per cent.

Victim Information Line



Victim Assistance Program workers use visual aids like What's My Job In Court? to help orient child victims/witnesses for a court appearance.

- Specialized Support Programs assisted 4,700 victims of crime in 1989/1990

60 per cent of clients were victims of wife assault, 34 per cent were victims of child sexual abuse, and 4 per cent were victims of sexual assault. 90 per cent of all victims assisted by Specialized Support Programs were female.

Specialized Support

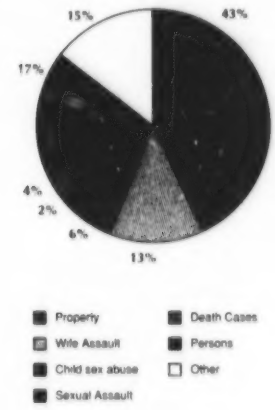
Coordinators and volunteers conducted a number of Sexual Assault and Wife Assault Awareness Workshops, and spoke about the issues of wife assault, sexual assault, child sexual abuse and date rape at a variety of schools and service clubs around the province.

In addition, some community agencies developed Wife Assault Coordination Committees to strengthen and enhance the response of the criminal justice system and social service agencies to the issues and problems of wife assault.

- **Police-based Victim Assistance Programs** assisted 13,600 victims of crime in 1989/1990.

43 per cent were victims of property crime, followed by victims of personal offences at 17 per cent, and victims of wife assault at 13 per cent.

Police Case Load



- Police-based programs recruited and trained seniors as volunteers to assist elderly victims of crime and abuse, and:

  - developed new interview rooms to provide a non-threatening atmosphere for the victims of sensitive or traumatic crimes;

  - raised funds to buy teddy bears to comfort child victims during police interviews;

  - initiated support groups for the victims of family violence;

  - developed age-specific court kits to help keep child victims busy while they are waiting to give their testimony in court; and

  - delivered public talks for both adults and school children on crime prevention and victimization.

"Every victim has the right to become actively involved in the criminal justice process. By going to victims' homes, by talking to them about what has happened, I can help victims move forward from a place of fear and trepidation, to figure out what steps they need to take to get over their victimization."

Mediator/Coordinator with Victim Reparation Programs

- **Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services** expanded to three additional Crown Counsel offices in 1989/1990 - in Surrey, Terrace and Kamloops - for a total of eight locations across the province. Also in 1989/1990, Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services:

  - changed its focus from general victim/witness assistance to deal specifically with the victims of major emotional or physical trauma and cases involving fatalities; and

  - decentralized its organization to incorporate victim/witness assistance into the day-to-day operations of Crown Counsel offices.

  - made presentations to the public and other victim assistance programs.

- **Victim Reparation Programs** provided 257 victims of crime with mediation services to explore the possibilities of offender compensation in 1989/1990.

Understanding how the court process works is important for victims of crime. Victim Assistance Program workers accompany victims to court before the trial to help them become more comfortable with the court process.

Approximately $30,000 was paid by offenders to compensate their victims for the consequences of their crimes.

Victim Reparation Programs also established a new multi-purpose program, based in Mackenzie, B.C., to serve a number of smaller surrounding communities not yet receiving victim assistance services. This new program offers victim reparation services along with victim support and referral.

- **Ministries Support Services** awarded discretionary grants to community groups in 1989/1990. These grants were used to deliver workshops, to conduct research and to raise public awareness.

Ministries Support Services provided training workshops, and funds for Program coordinators to attend the national Canadian Organization of Victim Assistance Conference in Toronto, and:

- developed handbooks for program workers on Wife Assault, Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault; and

- produced brochures and pamphlets for the public on Dealing with Breaking and Entering, Dealing with Sudden Death, the 1-800 VICTIMS Information Line and the Victim Assistance Program in general.

The Challenge Ahead:
1991 AND BEYOND

The first six months of the fiscal year 1990/1991 show that the significantly increasing caseloads of the last two years will continue.

These increasing caseloads can be attributed to the following factors;

- increase in the number and visibility of programs and;
- increased referrals from the justice system and other agencies;
- an upward trend in the reporting of family violence - particularly against women and children and adult survivors of child abuse.

The Challenge

The major challenge to all victim assistance programs is to meet this increasing caseload with continued high levels of care, compassion and efficiency.

The Ministries of Attorney General and Solicitor General have begun to lay the groundwork for enhancing victim assistance programs across the province.

The Plan

In 1991 and beyond, the two ministries will continue to provide leadership, direction and coordination to all victim assistance programs and to maintain an integrated response to the needs of victims of crime throughout B.C. by:

- encouraging victim participation in the criminal justice system;
- reorganizing victim assistance programs into nine regional sectors to encourage networking and the sharing of resources among all programs;
- encouraging all programs to develop new protocols for coordinated, cost-effective service delivery;
- continuing to promote community involvement and commitment; and
- increasing support, encouragement and recognition for dedicated Program workers and volunteers around the province.

Police-based Victim Assistance Programs offer emotional support and advice for victims of break and enter, right in their own homes.

The Initiatives

The Ministries together with individual programs have also begun planning to meet the challenge of 1991 and beyond.

All victim assistance programs will begin to develop and deliver culturally-sensitive services to meet the needs of Native victims of crime, and:

- Specialized Support Programs will work to enhance current services and to encourage the development of multi-cultural programs in large urban centres.
- Crown Victim/Witness Services will develop a Policy Manual for Victims Services within the Criminal Justice Branch of the Ministry of Attorney General and will work to assist more Crown Counsel throughout the province to prepare victims of crime for the court process.
- Victim Reparation Programs will review all services to improve service delivery and will continue to explore creative and productive opportunities for victims to participate in the criminal justice process.
- Police-based Victim Assistance Programs will work within the community to promote inter-agency responses to victimization and to develop new services to deal specifically with the victims of elder abuse.
- Ministries Support Services in consultation with The Justice Institute will develop new curricula for volunteer training. This will improve volunteers' knowledge of the psychology of victimization, the criminal justice system and court processes. It will also publish two new hand-books for program workers on Volunteer Management and Victims of Crime. The ministries will continue to develop training materials to help children with the court process.

The Commitment

The Victim Assistance Program of British Columbia is committed to meeting the needs of victims of crime and supporting them through the criminal justice process.

By working together to develop strong partnerships among the 95 victim assistance programs - and by strengthening ties with social service and health agencies across the province.

"I worked with the Parole Board as a community member for six years. I saw victims and witnesses as almost forgotten people. Through the Victim Assistance Program, I can help give victims courage and strength, make them feel worthwhile. That gives me a tremendous sense of satisfaction."

Volunteer with Crown Counsel Victim/Witness Services